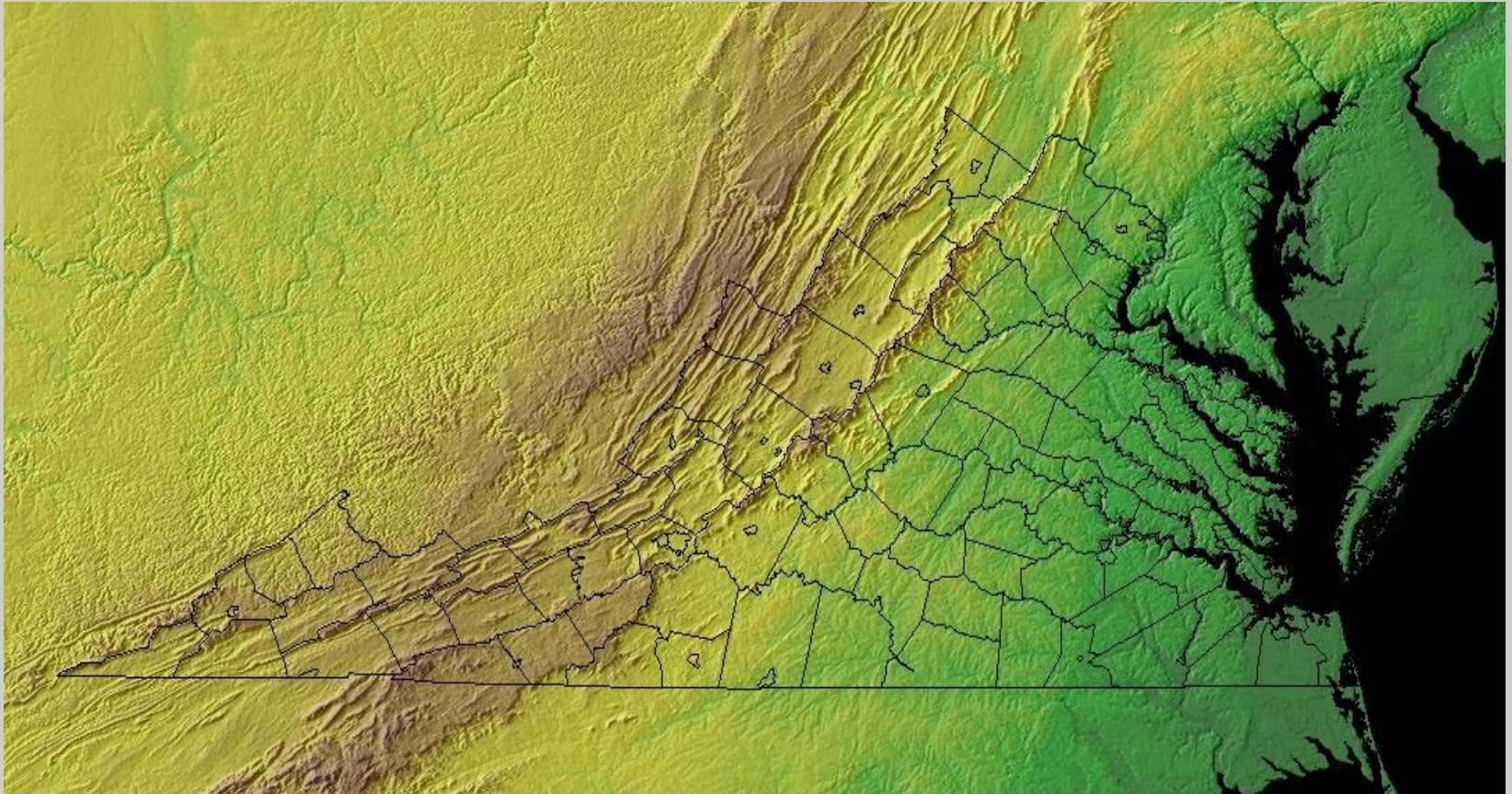


PR & Marketing For Conservation Districts: Ideas You Can Use



Open Door Communications
NACD Southeast Regional Meeting
August 28, 2007

A Case Study from Virginia



The Chesapeake Bay

The largest estuary in North America, the Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries have a surface area of approximately 4,480 square miles.



The Chesapeake Bay

- Commercial, recreational resource for 16 million people
- > 3,600 species of plants, fish, animals
- 29 species of waterfowl
- Major resting ground along Atlantic Migratory Flyway (1 million birds)
- Produces 500 million pounds of seafood per year (finfish, oysters, crabs)

Bay Fishing...



Threats to The Bay

- Water pollutants from point sources
- Nonpoint runoff
- Airborne pollutants from industry, emissions
- Water quality problems affect aquatic plants, animals
- Must reduce nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment, toxins

Virginia's Bay Cleanup Efforts:

- Partnership between states, federal agencies and others has existed for over 20 years
- Water Quality Improvement Fund for Bay cleanup, other impaired waters (1997 law)
- Monetary investments, tighter regulations for point-source dischargers
- Funding for Agricultural Best Management Practices (reduce nutrients, sediment)

To achieve Virginia's nonpoint
source pollution goals
in the Chesapeake Bay basin,
> 90% of the agricultural acres
need some "BMP" treatment

Districts Sell Cost-Share

- Administered and funded by state
- Carried out by all 47 Districts
- Incentives, funding for agricultural producers (75% state, 25% farmer)
- Over 30 unique BMPs available
- Last year \$10 million in BMP funding
- This year \$14 million

District Boards and Staff

- 333 District Directors
239 elected, 94 appointed (2 per District)
- >100 Technical staff (primarily w/ag focus)
- ~ 70 Administrative/educational/managerial employees

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

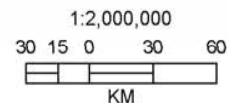
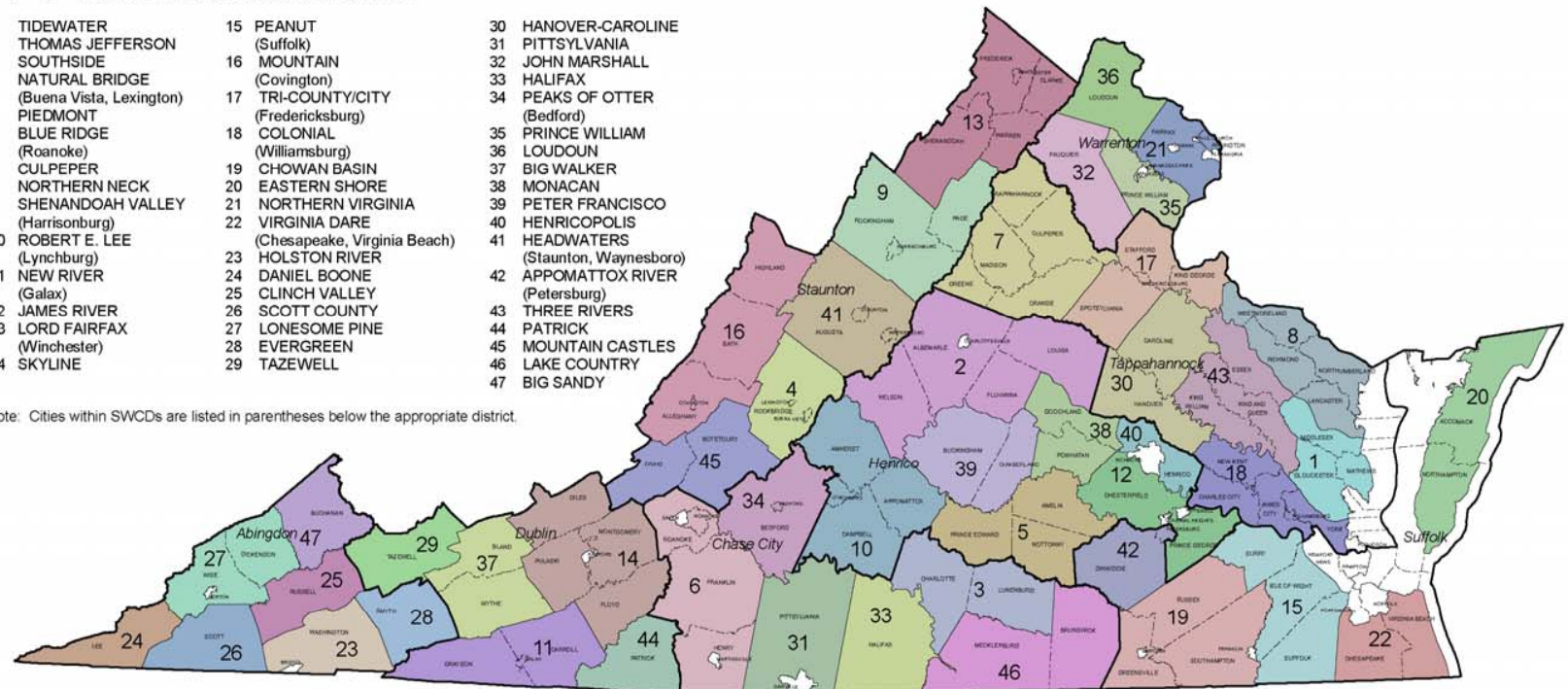
┌──┐ Jurisdiction Boundary

└──┘ DCR Regional Office Boundary

└──┘ Soil and Water Conservation Districts

- | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 TIDEWATER | 15 PEANUT | 30 HANOVER-CAROLINE |
| 2 THOMAS JEFFERSON | (Suffolk) | 31 PITTSYLVANIA |
| 3 SOUTHSIDE | 16 MOUNTAIN | 32 JOHN MARSHALL |
| 4 NATURAL BRIDGE | (Covington) | 33 HALIFAX |
| (Buena Vista, Lexington) | 17 TRI-COUNTY/CITY | 34 PEAKS OF OTTER |
| 5 PIEDMONT | (Fredericksburg) | (Bedford) |
| 6 BLUE RIDGE | 18 COLONIAL | 35 PRINCE WILLIAM |
| (Roanoke) | (Williamsburg) | 36 LOUDOUN |
| 7 CULPEPER | 19 CHOWAN BASIN | 37 BIG WALKER |
| 8 NORTHERN NECK | 20 EASTERN SHORE | 38 MONACAN |
| 9 SHENANDOAH VALLEY | 21 NORTHERN VIRGINIA | 39 PETER FRANCISCO |
| (Harrisonburg) | 22 VIRGINIA DARE | 40 HENRICOPOLIS |
| 10 ROBERT E. LEE | (Chesapeake, Virginia Beach) | 41 HEADWATERS |
| (Lynchburg) | 23 HOLSTON RIVER | (Staunton, Waynesboro) |
| 11 NEW RIVER | 24 DANIEL BOONE | 42 APPOMATTOX RIVER |
| (Galax) | 25 CLINCH VALLEY | (Petersburg) |
| 12 JAMES RIVER | 26 SCOTT COUNTY | 43 THREE RIVERS |
| 13 LORD FAIRFAX | 27 LONESOME PINE | 44 PATRICK |
| (Winchester) | 28 EVERGREEN | 45 MOUNTAIN CASTLES |
| 14 SKYLINE | 29 TAZEWELL | 46 LAKE COUNTRY |
| | | 47 BIG SANDY |

Note: Cities within SWCDs are listed in parentheses below the appropriate district.



DATA SOURCES:
SOIL & WATER DISTRICT BOUNDARY - VDCCR
JURISDICTION BOUNDARY - VDCCR
DCR REGIONAL OFFICE BOUNDARY - VDCCR

25 APR 2006

DCR's Charge to Us

- **RESEARCH:** Identify the most effective tools, strategies and messages for increasing adoption of agricultural Best Management Practices
- **CREATIVE:** Develop and execute research-based advertising, marketing communications and public relations activities to promote BMP adoption

A Five-Part Process

- Conduct research
- Formulate strategy
- Develop/test/refine creative
- Conduct campaign
- Evaluate campaign

Districts Engaged Throughout

- Included in research focus groups
- Two presentations to VASWCD board
- Overall presentation to pilot region staff
- Surveys and needs assessments
- Training, tools for pilot region staff
- Presentation at NACD Annual Meeting
- Presentation at Virginia Area 1 Meeting



Research

DCR's Research Objectives

- Identify major decision steps and influencers
- Determine perceptions of conservation and the Cost-Share Program
- Identify the most believable messages
- Understand needs of District staff
- Define the marketing media that maximize audience reach

Research Approach

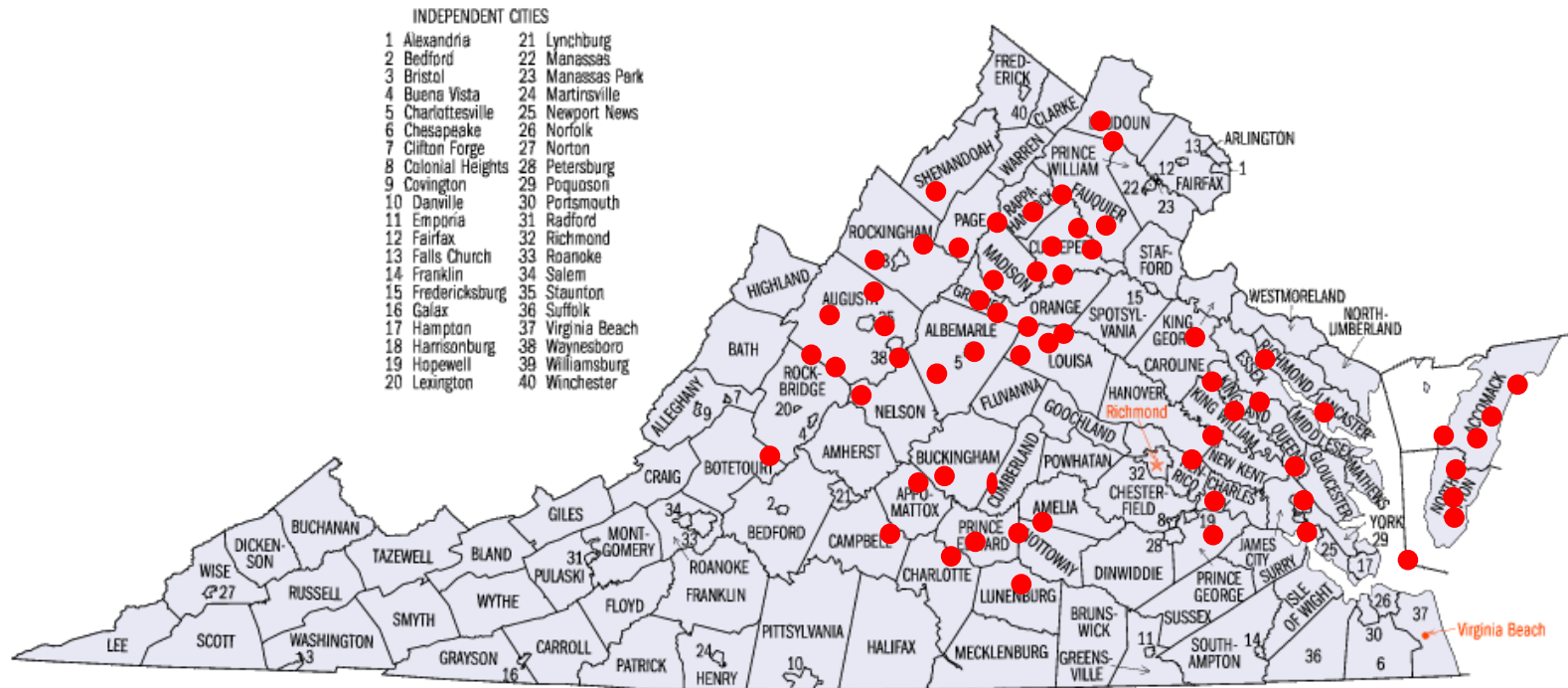
QUALITATIVE

- Explore unanticipated issues
- Probe further when needed
- Gain insight into emotion, behavior
- Put a face on issue, go to them

Qualitative Research Methods

- Focus groups
 - 8 Farmer groups (84 participants)
 - 2 District/NRCS groups
 - 2 Extension Agent groups
- Telephone surveys
 - 27 District Board Members
- Phone interviews with other states

Areas Represented by Farmers

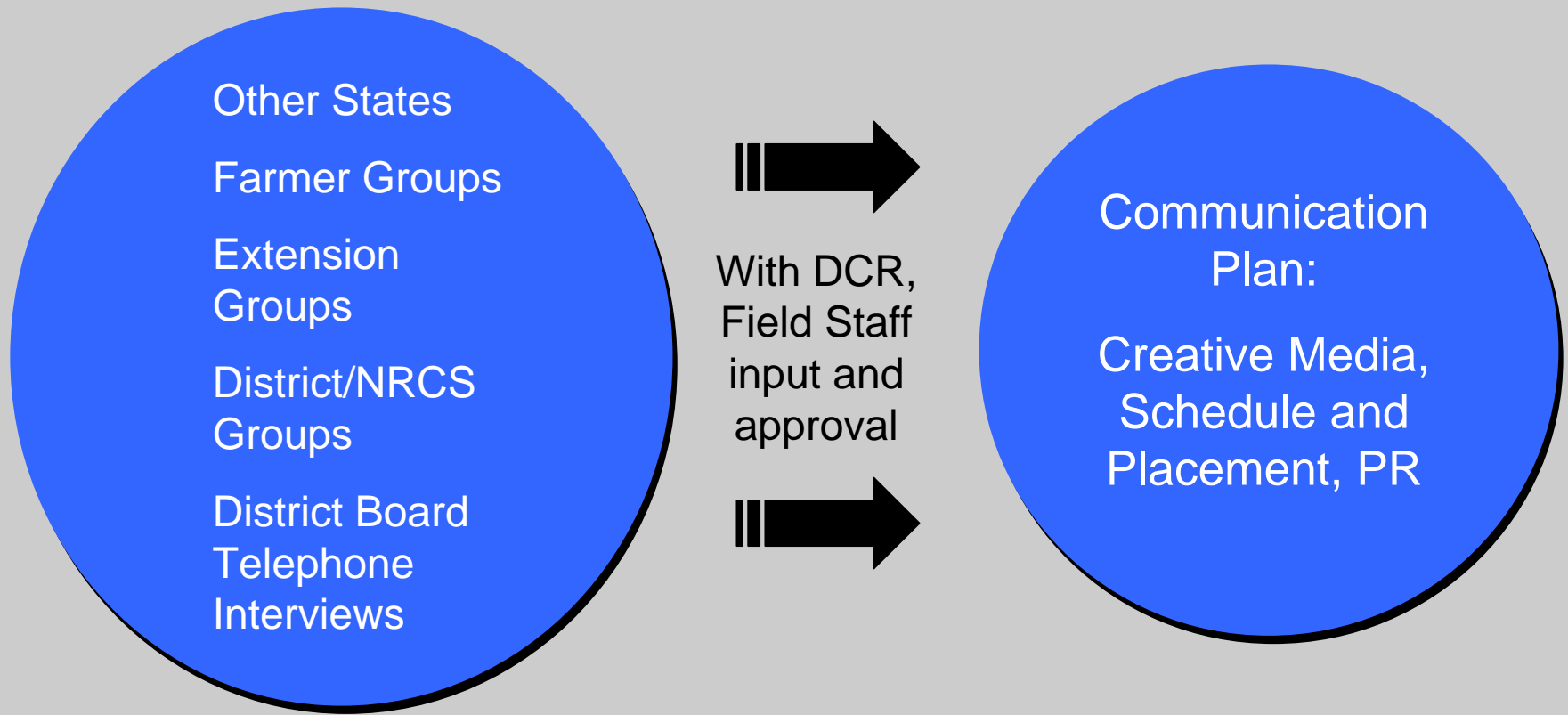


- May represent more than one participant

We Researched Farmers' Opinions & Attitudes About:

- Water quality
- Conservation
- Cost-Share programs
- Barriers to Cost-Share participation
- Specific Cost-Share practices
- Support agencies
- Promotion and communication

Research Directs the Communication Plan



Farmer Perceptions

- Farmers identify with conservation, stewardship
 - Messages should focus on conservation
- Farmers tired of being overlooked, even blamed
 - Craft messages carefully to avoid finger-pointing

Farmer Perceptions

- Cost-Share Program has low recall
 - Branding, stronger visual identity
- Farmers don't understand how some BMPs work
 - Look for educational opportunities

Farmer Motivators

- Money, good stewardship, peer opinion are top reasons for BMP implementation
 - Include funding information as possible
 - Appeal to sense of stewardship
 - Use peer opinion leaders

Farmer Demotivators

- The Bay is turnoff in West
 - Focus on local waterways
- Some associate Cost-Share Program with hassles, red tape
 - Create opportunities for quick and easy info, sign-up

What's the most effective message?

Conservation methods
can be compatible
with

PRODUCTION



Strategy

Communication Plan

- Educate farmers about positive relationship between conservation, production
- Drive farmers to District office, and ideally, to Cost-Share sign-up events
- Recognize farmers for conservation efforts
- Measure campaign results and evaluate

An Integrated Campaign

- Based on research
- Designed to work together
- Intended to run with necessary frequency
- Disseminated through channels that farmers prefer

The Valley Region as Pilot

- Headwaters SWCD
- Lord Fairfax SWCD
- Natural Bridge SWCD
- Mountain SWCD
- Mountain Castles SWCD
- Shenandoah Valley SWCD



The Valley Region as Pilot

- Test and measure in defined area
- Range of District sizes
- Variety of farm operations - size, type
- Logo, ads available to other Districts

Campaign Components

- Graphic identity: logos
- Advertising: print, radio, outdoor
- Collateral: brochure, display
- PR: news releases/articles
- District staff orientation and training

Campaign Timeline

PHASE 1 - AWARENESS

- Approximately 6 weeks
- Newspaper and radio: 2/12 - 3/19
- Outdoor boards up March - April
- Newsletter articles / news releases

How Did Districts Benefit?

- Research-based, professionally developed advertising/marketing/PR
- No cost to district for creative development and media placement
- More help to sell Cost-Share
- Additional administrative tools & training



Creative

Graphic Identity

- Many different logos in use by Districts
- We strongly recommended Districts use a uniform brand in the campaign
- Good logos convey essence, not details
- Visual repetition builds awareness for everyone
- Several Districts have adopted for their own use

Campaign Logo



We work with the people who work the land.

Advertising

- First phase: awareness (February-April)
- Print, radio and outdoor
- Placement planned by media professional

Advertising Placement

- Rural newspapers, mostly weeklies
- Districts chose from 8 print ad options
- Rural radio stations that have farm reports
- Outdoor boards

Newspaper Ads

**He's of a mind to
make a profit.**



**He's of a mind to
protect the land.**



They'll have a meeting of the minds at their local SWCD.

Stop by your local Soil and Water Conservation District, and you'll learn how some conservation practices improve production and, with federal and state cost-sharing, can be affordable, too. Experienced staff at your district office can recommend practices that fit your situation. Answer any questions that come up. And help you qualify for funding. Because successful farmers know conservation makes good business sense.

Natural Bridge SWCD: (540)463-7124 Opt. 3



**We work with the people
who work the land.**

Sponsored by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Newspaper Ads

Beef producer.



Conservationist.



Your local SWCD is geared to the success of both.

Stop by your local Soil and Water Conservation District, and you'll learn how some conservation practices improve production and, with federal and state cost-sharing, can be affordable, too. Experienced staff at your district office can recommend practices that fit your situation. Answer any questions that come up. And help you qualify for funding. Because successful farmers know conservation makes good business sense.

Mountain Castles SWCD: (540)977-2698 ext. 3



We work with the people
who work the land.

Sponsored by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Newspaper Ads

You have to produce.



You want to conserve.



Announcing a Conservation Event for the both of you.

Crop Production Field Day

In Partnership with Virginia Cooperative Extension and NRCS

You'll learn how some conservation practices improve production and, with federal and state cost-sharing, can be affordable, too. There's no charge to participate. A light breakfast and lunch will be provided. To register, call (540) 868-1130, ext. 3 by 3/13/07. Plan to attend. Because successful farmers know conservation makes good business sense.

Friday,
March 16,
9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Clarke County
Fairgrounds*



We work with the people
who work the land.

Sponsored by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. *Visit www.clarkecountyfair.org for directions.

Newspaper Ad Reach

- 15 newspapers in the Valley Region
- At least two newspapers per District
- Six insertions per ad
- Total circulation of all papers: 137,500

Outdoor Ads

**You have
to produce.**



**You want
to conserve.**



**Learn how you
can do both at your
local SWCD.**



*We work with the people who work the land.
Sponsored by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.*

Shenandoah Valley SWCD: (540)555-1212

Outdoor Ads



Outdoor Board Reach

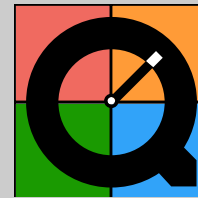
- One board per District
- Highest available traffic count in each area
- Up for at least two months

Radio Ads

- Reinforce print campaign
- WINC, WIQO, WREL, WKCY, WKDW, WSVA
- Two :60 spots played in rotation
- Tagged with local contact information

Radio Spots

Let's take a listen.....



Marketing Collateral

- Updated Cost-Share brochure
- Tabletop Cost-Share display

Updated Cost-Share Brochure

Farmers and District staff wanted:

- color photos of BMPs
- bigger, clearer map of Districts
- more accessible text
- information about how to qualify
- text that speaks to farmers

Updated Cost-Share Brochure

As a farmer, you've probably heard the expression that "conservation pays."

You're interested in doing what's right for your farm and right for protecting our natural resources. But as a business owner, you need to weigh the cost and benefit of every farm investment.

The Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program, or "VACS," helps farmers balance their desire to be good stewards with the need to remain profitable. In fact, thousands have participated in this statewide program for more than two decades – just ask your neighbors.

VACS is administered by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and carried out by the Commonwealth's 47 Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Your local SWCD can help you implement the best management practices that make sense for your farming operation.

In fact, your SWCD often provides funding that will cover as much as 75 percent of your cost to implement conservation measures that can help improve water quality.

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL SWCD FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT HOW CONSERVATION PRACTICES CAN BENEFIT YOUR OPERATION:

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| APPOMATTOX RIVER SWCD..... | (804) 469-7297 |
| BIG SANDY SWCD..... | (276) 566-4858 |
| BIG WALKER SWCD..... | (276) 228-3513 |
| BLUE RIDGE SWCD..... | (540) 483-5341 |
| CHOWAN BASIN SWCD..... | (434) 634-2115 |
| CLINCH VALLEY SWCD..... | (276) 869-4650 |
| COLONIAL SWCD..... | (804) 932-4376 |
| CULPEPER SWCD..... | (540) 625-8591 |
| DANIEL BOONE SWCD..... | (276) 346-1658 |
| EASTERN SHORE SWCD..... | (757) 787-0918 |
| EVERGREEN SWCD..... | (276) 783-7280 |
| HALIFAX SWCD..... | (434) 476-7523 |
| HANOVER-CAROLINE SWCD..... | (804) 537-5225 |
| HEADWATERS SWCD..... | (540) 248-6218 |
| HENRICO POLIS..... | (804) 501-5175 |
| HOLSTON RIVER SWCD..... | (276) 628-8187 |
| JAMES RIVER SWCD..... | (804) 957-6156 |
| JOHN MARSHALL SWCD..... | (540) 347-3120 |
| LAKE COUNTRY SWCD..... | (434) 738-0150 |
| LONESOME PINE SWCD..... | (276) 926-6621 |
| LORD FAIRFAX SWCD..... | (540) 868-1130 |
| LOUDOUN SWCD..... | (703) 777-2075 |
| ACORNACAN SWCD..... | (804) 556-4936 |
| MOUNTAIN CASTLES SWCD..... | (540) 977-2698 |
| MOUNTAIN SWCD..... | (540) 839-4616 |
| NATURAL BRIDGE SWCD..... | (540) 463-7124 |
| NEW RIVER SWCD..... | (276) 236-7191 |
| NORTHERN NECK SWCD..... | (804) 333-3525 |
| NORTHERN VIRGINIA SWCD..... | (703) 324-1460 |
| PATRICK SWCD..... | (276) 694-3121 |
| PEAKS OF OTTER SWCD..... | (540) 566-9195 |
| PIANIT SWCD..... | (757) 357-7004 |
| PETER FRANCISCO SWCD..... | (434) 963-4757 |
| PIEDMONT SWCD..... | (434) 392-3782 |
| PITTSYLVANIA SWCD..... | (434) 432-8146 |
| PRINCE WILLIAM SWCD..... | (703) 594-3621 |
| ROBERT E. LEE SWCD..... | (434) 352-2819 |
| SCOTT COUNTY SWCD..... | (276) 366-9241 |
| SHENANDOAH VALLEY SWCD..... | (540) 433-2853 |
| SKYLINE SWCD..... | (540) 362-3262 |
| SOUTHSIDE SWCD..... | (434) 542-5342 |
| TAZEWELL SWCD..... | (276) 988-9588 |
| THOMAS JEFFERSON SWCD..... | (434) 975-0224 |
| THREE RIVERS SWCD..... | (804) 443-2327 |
| TIDEWATER SWCD..... | (804) 693-3562 |
| TRI COUNTY/ CITY SWCD..... | (540) 899-9492 |
| VIRGINIA DARE SWCD..... | (757) 385-4775 |

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation programs, activities, and employment opportunities are available to all people regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, or political affiliation. DCR is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.



CONSERVATION AND THE BOTTOM LINE

Virginia's Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program



Updated Cost-Share Brochure

WE'LL HELP YOU DO YOUR SHARE

Why do Virginia's waters need improving? Nonpoint source pollution is the primary reason. Run-off from suburban lawns, golf courses and paved surfaces has increased along with our state's population. DCR works with homeowners and municipalities to address these issues.

But agriculture also is a contributor to nonpoint source pollution. For example, the 2002 *State of the Bay Report* estimated that 41 percent of the phosphorus and 38 percent of the nitrogen entering the Chesapeake Bay originate from cropland.

Through the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program, or "VACS," your SWCD not only can help you do your share to improve water quality – it can help you pay for it, too. Since 1984, SWCDs have distributed nearly \$69 million in cost-share funds to farmers and landowners like you.

THROUGH VACS, YOU CAN:

- Maintain farm productivity
- Receive technical assistance
- Earn funding for your efforts

JOIN OUR CONSERVATION PARTNERS

DCR and your local SWCD encourage you to seek any conservation assistance for which you might qualify. Other agencies that offer financial incentives and technical support include the USDA Farm Service Agency and Natural Resource Conservation Service, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and the Virginia Department of Forestry.

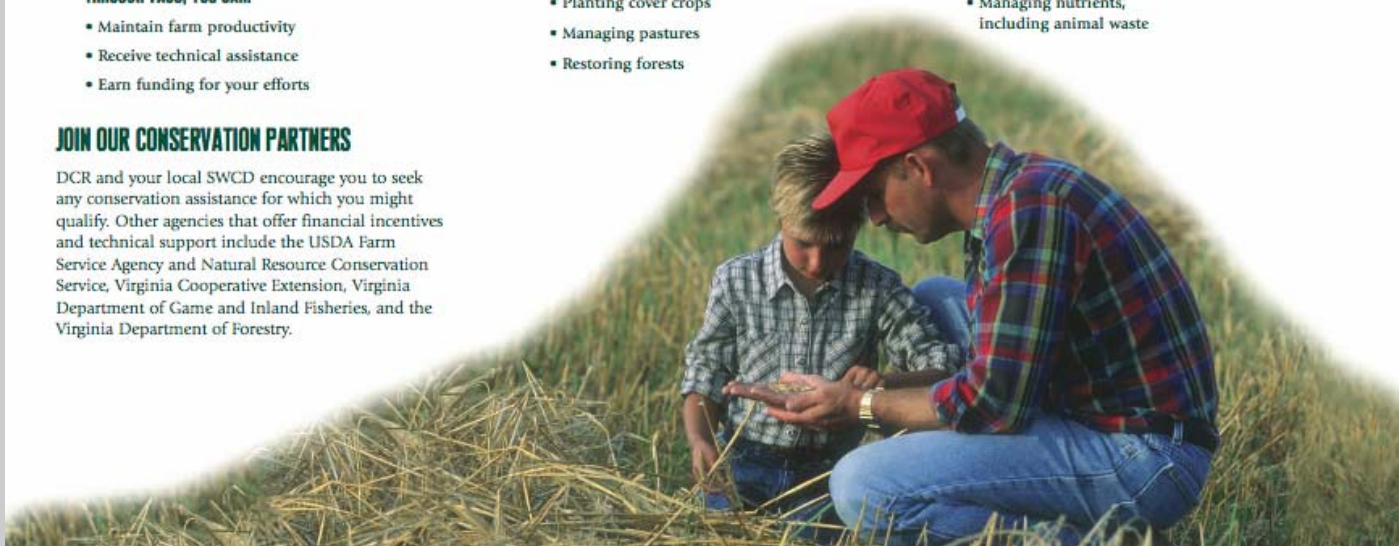
WE FUND BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

VACS offers more than 50 conservation practices that cover the full spectrum of agricultural operations. Whether you grow crops, raise livestock or produce poultry, there are BMPs that can benefit you.

That's because while all of the practices are known to improve or protect water quality, many also can increase farm productivity by conserving soil and making wise use of other agricultural resources.

ASK YOUR SWCD ABOUT FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR:

- Controlling erosion
- Stream fencing and alternative watering systems
- Restoring riparian areas
- Planting cover crops
- Managing pastures
- Restoring forests
- Preserving wetlands
- Protecting sinkholes
- Stabilizing streams
- Managing nutrients, including animal waste



Updated Cost-Share Brochure

YOU HAVE TO PRODUCE. YOU WANT TO CONSERVE. SEE YOUR SWCD.

Through the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program ("VACS"), your local SWCD can help you balance your desire to be a good steward with your need to remain profitable. Since 1984, SWCDs have distributed nearly \$69 million in cost-share funds to farmers and landowners like you.

Cost-share funding usually becomes available on July 1 for the following growing season. Demand for cost-share assistance can be great, so timely applications are encouraged. SWCD staff welcome your interest and often can assist you with the paperwork.

QUALIFY FOR VACS FUNDING

You may qualify for cost-share money if you:

- are an individual, partnership, corporation, trust or other business operating a farm in Virginia;
- there is a water quality issue on your farm that needs to be addressed; and you
- submit a complete and timely application to your SWCD.

In addition, your project must:

- be approved by your local SWCD board;
- meet VACS technical specifications; and
- pass a field inspection, if one is required.

There is a cap on the amount a farmer can receive annually from VACS. Check with your SWCD for details. The state cost-share payment cannot exceed 75 percent of the total eligible costs or the fixed practice rate.

LOOK INTO TAX CREDIT

In addition, state income tax credits are available for the purchase and use of certain conservation equipment and for specified best management practices. Ask your SWCD for more information.

VACS offers more than 50 conservation practices that cover the full spectrum of agricultural operations. Here are a few of the practices with the greatest impact on water quality.

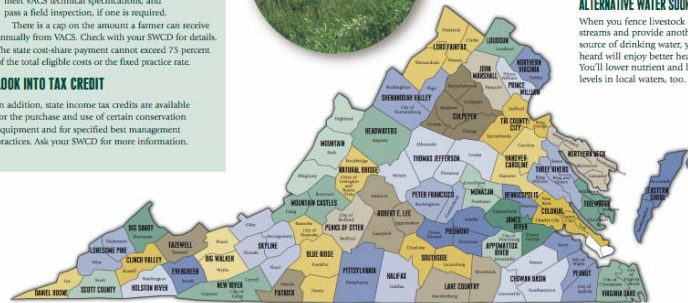
INSTALL A STREAMSIDE BUFFER

Planting trees, shrubs and herbaceous vegetation between field margins and streams creates habitat for enemies of crop pests and can limit your losses from flooding. Riparian buffers also filter nutrient runoff and prevent erosion.



FENCE STREAMS AND PROVIDE ALTERNATIVE WATER SOURCES.

When you fence livestock out of streams and provide another source of drinking water, your herd will enjoy better health. You'll lower nutrient and bacteria levels in local waters, too.



To learn more, contact your local SWCD. See back panel for contact information.



USE A PLAN TO MANAGE NUTRIENTS

Following a professionally developed nutrient management plan lets you maintain optimum conditions for crop growth while improving efficiency and even saving money. Plans also reduce the nutrients that leave your farm.



STABILIZE HIGHLY ERODIBLE LAND

Grassed waterways, contoured strip cropping and stream bank stabilization control erosion so you can hold on to your valuable land. In addition, these practices keep sediment from choking streams.



PLANT YEAR-ROUND COVER

Implement a continuous system of year-round cover and you'll improve soil structure, suppress weeds and conserve moisture—all while reducing erosion. There's a cover crop to fit almost every rotation and production need.

At your local SWCD, we work with the people who work the land.

Public Relations

- Local news releases
- Can use releases in District newsletters
- Media outreach

PR Placements

- *Richmond Times-Dispatch*: AP brief
- *Newport News Daily Press*: AP brief
- *Staunton News Leader*
- *Rockbridge Weekly*
- WDBJ-TV 7, Roanoke
- WHSV-TV 3, Harrisonburg

PR Placements





Results

Post-Campaign Evaluation

- Creative products used broadly?
- Evidence of increase in local awareness?
- Which tactics were well-received?
- What needs to be fine-tuned?
- What needs to be done before Phase 2?

What We Learned

- Building relationships is important
- District staff are busy!
- Press releases are valued
- People seemed to notice radio (the most?)
- Need frequency to build awareness

Where Are We Now?

- Deciding what to do in Phase 2
- Want to spread campaign to rest of the Bay Watershed
- Possibility: Cost-Share Display
- Possibility: PR & Marketing Training



What You Can Learn

Invest in Research

- Confirms hunches, prompts new thinking
- Can help gain buy-in from subject group
- Can help win funding, lends credibility
- Provides platform for planning, programs
- BEST basis for effective communication

Invest in Research

- 1) What you you want to know? What will you do with what you find out?
- 2) What's the best approach to obtain that information?
 - Qualitative - descriptive, observe, gain insights (focus group)
 - Quantitative - numbers, measure, predict (survey)

Invest in Research

3) What's your budget?

- A third party helps with perceived objectivity
- Consider partnering - state conservation agency, college, Extension
- Consider secondary (available) research - NACD, USDA, etc.

4) What are your opportunities?

- When do you gather with large groups of farmers?
- When do you mail to large groups of farmers?

Some more things
farmers told us...

Farmers Want Partnerships

Where do farmers get their conservation information?

Extension Agents

District Staff

NRCS/Forestry

Other Farmers -
Word of Mouth

Farmers Want Partnerships

Extension Agents are the Most Trusted Source for Virginia Farmers



Farmers Have Media Preferences

- Face-to-face communication with trusted sources
 - Other farmers
 - District personnel with established relationship
 - Extension agents
- Partnership events with their producer associations
 - Conferences
 - Field Days

Farmers Have Media Preferences

- Farmers like traditional media
 - District and other newsletters
 - Rural weekly newspapers
 - Rural radio advertising, adjacent to ag content
- Farmers LOVE field signs

Develop Strategic Messages

It goes beyond giving people information, or telling them what they should do....

Develop Strategic Messages

What are their perceptions?

Farmers are unfairly blamed for pollution

What are their motivators?

Bottom line productivity, positive recognition

How can you reframe your message to connect with your audience?

You have to produce, you want to conserve

Strengthen Your Brand

BRAND: “A symbolic embodiment of a product/service that creates associations and expectations.”

- How does your district identify itself visually?
 - Be consistent (colors, type, application)
 - Keep it simple, emphasize what’s essential
 - Make sure it fits who you are, what you do
- How well does the public understand who you are and what you do?
 - Put it in a nutshell
 - Use your “nutshell” every time you communicate externally
 - Consider boundary signage

Strengthen Your Brand

BRAND: “An expectation of performance.”

- What kind of experience do you offer your customers?
 - Ask them for feedback on service quality
 - Learn from peer organizations
 - Think about what you want to be known for

If you remember nothing else...

It's all about your target audience

and what's in it for them.

Any Questions?

